



FROM REPORT
TO RESULTS



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Understanding & Advocating for School Funding

When parent leaders approach administrators with a new request, they may be met with the common refrain, “We just don’t have the money for it.” And so, PTAs often need to fundraise to pay for the needs of their students and families—be it art education or new playground equipment. But the questions that linger are, “Why isn’t there money allocated for these resources already?” and “Where does school funding come from and where does it go towards?” It’s essential that you understand the basics of education finance to effectively advocate for the needs of our school community. We are here to help!

Education Finance 101: Your Frequently Asked Questions



Where does the money for my child’s school come from?

Schools get money from their district. The district gets money primarily from state and local sources. The federal government contributes only a small portion of funding, about 10% of the budget for most districts.¹ While some PTAs raise large sums of money, even in wealthier districts PTA fundraising tends to account for no more than 1% of the overall budget.²

How can I find out how much money my child’s school district spends?

There are many factors that affect how much money a district (and schools within that district) receive. For example, schools that qualify for Title I funding may receive additional money from the federal government. You can explore the differences in funding between districts by looking for **per pupil expenditures**.

Per pupil expenditures is the term for the amount of money a district receives per student. Recent data reveals that the United States spends an average of \$12,756 per student, but there are large differences between states even once adjusted for cost of living. Taking into account regional cost differences, New York spent \$19,697 per student while Texas spent \$8,619 per student.³

Who makes the decisions about how the school spends its money?

The district budget is determined through a collaboration between district administrators and the local school board. Ultimately, the local school board is responsible for approving the district budget. Principals have some flexibility in how funds are spent at their school, but larger allocations (salaries, facilities, etc.) are typically outside of their control.⁴

¹ McNeil, M. (2013). [Reading a District Budget: Reporter Guide](#). Education Writers Association. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service)

² Roza, M. (2020, March). [Money Talks: School Finance 101](#) [Audio blog post]. Retrieved from

³ [Map: How Much Money Each State Spends Per Student](#). (2020, April 29). Retrieved from

⁴ [The School District Budget Process](#). (2006). Education Source.





How do school districts spend most of their money?

On average, 80-85% of the school budget is spent on employee salaries and benefits. These employees include not only teachers and administrators, but also custodians, cafeteria workers, bus drivers and more.⁵

How to Get Involved: Steps for Getting Started

Do some initial research.

Does your school receive as much money as other schools in the district? How does your district budget compare to others in your state? Has your state or district announced budget cuts for this upcoming school year? Start with a google search and turn to school board members or district officials to get the answers you can't find online.

Think about the tradeoffs and decide on your priorities.

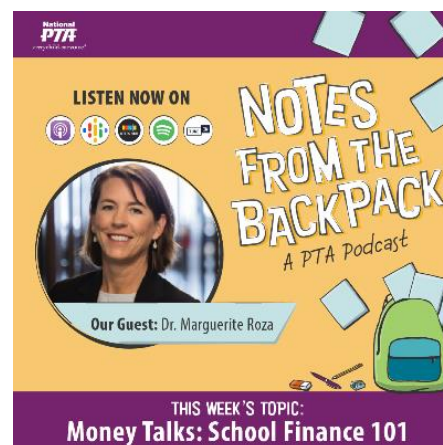
Families can't advocate for everything. There is only so much money, and families need to think carefully about what matters most for them. As you advocate for your child, it's important to understand that asking for increased funding for a specific resource will lead to decreases in other areas.

Attend a School Board Meeting.

Your school board signs off on the budget and—in most districts—you elect those representatives. You can attend a school board meeting to ask questions, to advocate for specific priorities, or even to get a better sense of what's happening in your district. When it is election time, remember to do your research and vote for a school board member who will advocate for the interests of your child, and all children.

Listen to Learn More

Notes from the Backpack: a PTA podcast featured two interviews with Dr. Marguerite Roza, Director of the Edunomics Lab. Listen to [Money Talks: School Finance 101](#) and [Education Finance 201: COVID Bonus Episode](#) to learn more.



⁵ Ellerson, N. (n.d.). [School Budgets 101](#) (Issue brief)

